

PLANNING FOR THE FOUR PORTS

By Anne Donovan, CZM

To help coastal communities prepare for the challenges of the 21st Century, the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) works with municipalities to develop and implement harbor plans. Funded under the state's Seaport Bond, extensive harbor planning efforts have been undertaken in the four major ports outside of Boston. The following is an update on port planning progress in these communities.

GLOUCESTER

Gloucester was the first of the four ports to complete its Municipal Harbor Plan, which was approved by the Secretary of Environmental Affairs in July of 1999. The plan provides specific strategies for maintaining the harbor as an active working port, principally dedicated to revitalizing of the fishing industry. The plan also recognizes that the harbor area can accommodate other uses, including visitor-oriented education, recreation, and commerce, and recommends three key actions: 1) upgrading the public infrastructure of the harbor (dredging and navigation, public access, seawalls, wastewater treatment, streets, and parking); 2) strengthening the traditional working port by creating a new, private Gloucester harbor partnership organization that will assist small- to medium-sized businesses on historic finger piers; and 3) capitalizing on the cultural and natural assets of the harbor by developing a maritime museum and attracting private investment to the downtown area. Since plan approval, Gloucester has made tremendous progress with plan implementation, including: successful seawall reconstruction; removal of

seven derelict vessels from the harbor; preliminary planning for a Harbor Walk around the inner harbor; rebuilding of St. Peter's Marina, which now provides safe and efficient slips for Gloucester's commercial lobster boats; formation of a Private Gloucester Harbor Partnership Organization; and the completion of a feasibility study for a high-speed passenger and car ferry between Gloucester and Nova Scotia.

SALEM

In November of 2000, Salem's Municipal Harbor Plan was officially approved by the state. Salem's plan outlines a comprehensive strategy for protecting and enhancing the economic, environmental, historic, and cultural resources related to Salem Harbor and contains nearly 70 specific recommendations. The most important waterside recommendation is to dredge the harbor to maintain safe navigation. On the landside, a key recommendation is continuous pedestrian access along the edge of Salem Harbor from Winter Island to Palmer Cove, to be known as the "Salem Harbor Walk." Finally, the centerpiece of the plan is a publicly developed, multi-use maritime facility known as New Salem Wharf, which would provide nearly a half-mile of new dockage and associated services for a range of commercial vessel operations, primarily for water-borne passenger transportation. Since plan approval, Salem has been working diligently to implement the plan and has worked with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and state agencies to coordinate maintenance dredging of the Federal Channel; planned for construction of a walkway along

South River, opening a large waterfront area formerly unavailable to the public (this project is currently being launched with the assistance of CZM and the Department of Environmental Protection); completed the first stage of planning for New Salem Wharf; and initiated the public process for creating a Harbor Overlay District to implement and enforce the Harbor Plan provisions.

NEW BEDFORD/FAIRHAVEN

New Bedford Harbor is bounded to the west by New Bedford and the east by Fairhaven. Together, these communities developed the New Bedford/Fairhaven Municipal Harbor Plan, which was approved on September 24, 2002. The plan recognizes the port's status as one of the state's most vibrant Designated Port Areas (DPAs—see page 27) and prioritizes strengthening and supporting the marine industrial activities that are the heart of the port. The plan includes a number of strategies to mobilize investment in the working waterfront, first and foremost focusing on essential transportation infrastructure improvements, specifically dredging, development of a major intermodal transportation center, and the redesign of area highways. In addition, the plan calls for the construction of a ferry terminal, fishing industry pier expansions, and the development of a marine industrial park, among a host of other specific recommendations. To diversify the harbor economy through tourism,

The Port of Salem has a rich and culturally significant maritime tradition.



the plan calls for both waterside and landside infrastructure improvements. In the water, the focus is on expanding recreational boating slips and mooring fields and developing a water taxi service. The ambitious landside strategy includes a network of major open space destinations, anchored by large “island parks” at each end of the harbor. A harbor gateway area is proposed for each community, with extensive streetscape improvements along Main and Middle Streets in Fairhaven and a major Harbor Promenade along the landside edge of the New Bedford fishing piers and the State Pier. New Bedford’s proposed Oceanarium is expected to substantially complement these efforts and serve as a cornerstone for future tourism activity in the port. To support tourism and downtown revitalization, a hotel is included in the plan, to be located just outside the DPA. Even though the plan was just recently approved, many plan components were implemented during the planning process. For example, a Quick Start Ferry Terminal has been completed and commenced operation in the summer of 2001 to carry freight to Martha’s Vineyard. To support many of these activities, New Bedford completed the first phase of navigational dredging in the summer of 2002. Lastly, to complete the improvements, a major parcel of land within the DPA has been subdivided into an industrial park to be used exclusively for port and marine industrial purposes, especially fish processing.

FALL RIVER

Fall River continues to move ahead with harbor planning and implementation activities. Specifically, design and planning work progresses

on a multi-use pier facility to replace the existing building on the State Pier. The plan is to use a two-level strategy for the new building, with the first floor for marine industrial activities and the new second floor for supporting commercial and tourist activities. The western face of the state pier is being rebuilt to be more conducive to the docking of large vessels. The city has begun work on a Harbor Boardwalk extension, which is expected to be completed in October, 2003, and will make the Fall River Boardwalk one of the longest in the state. Fall River has secured close to \$1 million for the project thus far and is seeking additional funding through the next Federal Transportation Bond Bill to develop a detailed feasibility study and conception design for rebuilding Route 79 along the waterfront to make it more tourist friendly and to free up several acres of land for commercial development along the waterfront. Environmental assessments have been conducted on the City Pier site, which is targeted for a future hotel and Brownfield cleanup funds are now being pursued. The state has completed a feasibility study on waterfront parking around the State Pier as a first step in looking at parking and port cargo space needs of the area. Future port expansion activities for Fall River include maintenance dredging, accommodation of cruise ships, further developing port operations and industry, industrial waterfront development, and attracting tourism. Tourist sites include Battleship Cove (home to the *U.S.S. Massachusetts*) and the Fall River Heritage State Park with its boardwalk and meadow for picnics and summer concerts.



Together, Fairhaven and New Bedford developed a Municipal Harbor Plan to strengthen and support the marine industrial activities at the heart of the port.